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Razali

WHAT HAVING WORLD'S TALLEST BUILDING MEANS TO MALAYSIA

SAN FRANCISCO, May 20 (Bernama) -- On May 2, the New York Times published an article entitled "Malaysia Looks Down on World From 1,483 Feet".

Referring to the world's tallest building -- the Petronas Twin Towers nearing completion in Kuala Lumpur -- it says: "It was a heady achievement for Malaysia, which yearns to become a player on the international scene, and the symbolism is apt. Perhaps no nation is remaking itself physically with more ambition than this one".

But to Malaysia's New York-based Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tan Sri Razali Ismail, having the tallest building reflects many facets of Malaysians, and the stability, development and progress achieved by the country.

Having the tallest building did not make Malaysia a player on the international scene but its international activism over the past several years had come about through a process of evolution and involvement," said Razali, who addressed a luncheon meeting of the "Malaysia-United States Business and Technology Forum at the Hotel Nikko here. The forum was opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Looking at Malaysia from New York, which itself has buildings which are among the world's tallest, Razali said he was seeing Malaysia's activism not just springing from political leadership and neither did the Malaysian leadership use activism abroad to distract or make up for internal deficiencies.

Speaking on "Malaysia's Role in the International Community of Nations", Razali said Malaysia's activism was also grass-roots driven.

Citing examples, he said that on issues such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, environmental justice or democracy among nations, the Malaysian public held strong views and expected their representatives and civil servants to articulate positions at all fora.

"But let me underline that there is no single prescribed role for Malaysia. We are happy to be a catalyst for change, joining others to determine consensus for a better world in promoting universally accepted values and democracy among states and reducing global elitism.

"Perhaps 15 years ago Malaysia could have chosen just to go for economic growth and "be nice", choosing a "patron" from a major power that will look over our shoulder as we take positions on issues," he said.

But Razali said Malaysia decided otherwise and instead chose to be critical, pragmatic and in pursuit and in support of universal principles and not to depend on the umbrella of a "patron".

Razali, regarded as among the most highly respected ambassadors at the United Nations, said that in his personal view, Malaysia's external relations were based on "principled pragmatism".

Malaysia's challenge as a nation had been to reconcile the importance of principles and the imperatives of pragmatism in inter-state as well as international relations.

"While we insist on sovereign equality, we are sanguine enough to realise that not all states are equal.

In yet another criticism of the UN, he said: "The UN Charter recognises that some countries are more equal than others but there must be commitment to a global programme with global responsibilities, much of which is not in evidence at the UN at this time as those more equal than others are not

undertaking responsible leadership at the UN".

Elaborating on Malaysia's involvement in helping Bosnia, which he said was the country's first geo-strategic experience, Razali argued that it was premised on preventing the destruction of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state in Europe, a part of the so called enlightened world.

Following the Dayton Accord that provides a chance for peace to take hold in the war-torn Balkan state, Malaysian troops are in Bosnia now as part of a multi-national implementation force (Ifor), led by NATO.

Razali told the forum that Malaysia was the only developing country to take part in Ifor and having to bear the entire operational costs of maintaining the 1,500-strong battalion showed its readiness to match rhetoric with action.

"At some cost, we speak out against selectivity, double standards and gloval elitism," he said.

But Razali conceded that being critical of others, Malaysia was opening itself even more critically to the examination of others and this was something unavoidable.

"Malaysia will continue to play its part in building bridges of meaningful partnership where nations, irrespective of their size and level of development, will contribute towards a common future and collective justice," he said. -- BERNAMA

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